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ABSTRACT

Vocational education is for all students; however, goals for student attainment should be relevant. Achievement of sequential goals should help each student qualify for a position in the world of work. Stressing communication skills can help prepare students for whatever work they choose. Learning opportunities for students to achieve objectives need to follow selected principles of learning from the psychology of education. These principles include the following: (1) secure the student's interest; (2) help students perceive meaning in ongoing tasks; (3) meet student needs; (4) provide sequential learning for students; (5) provide positive reinforcement; and (6) accept each student. Students should be evaluated so that teachers can determine what students have not understood. The teacher should also conduct self-appraisal by asking such questions as "Were students interested in the learing opportunities?"; "Was an appropriate sequence used?"; "Were students given assistance as needed?" Vocational education needs to emphasize the concept of excellence in the curriculum. Excellence in teaching and excellence in student achievement are musts in ongoing course work. (KC)

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RELEVANCY IN THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM

Vocational education is for all students, including the academically talented person. Definite goals can be in the offing in the vocational arena, which are beneficial to each student regardless of age level.

The 1983 A Nation at Risk report by the National Commission for Excellence in Education greatly minimized or even ignored the worth of vocational education. A Nation at Risk emphasized the importance of academic classes, such as four years of English, as well as three years each of mathematics, social studies, and science. This report advocated a curriculum of academic studies for all secondary students. A salient question arises as to why the emphasis upon academics studies for all students. Where high school is terminal education, what assistance for life will students receive from a heavily endowed course of studies stressing abstract, subject matter content? Certainly secondary students are in evidence who need the concrete and hands on experiences to prepare them for the world of work. The interests, abilities, and purposes of these students lean toward the practical and the utilitarian in the vocational arena.

In all reality, there should be no separation of the academic from the vocational. Eventually, all enter the world of work, be it occupations, professions, vocations, or jobs. Vital work in the world needs completion. Each person has a niche to fulfill in society.

The writer will concentrate in the balance of this paper on the vocational education facets of the curriculum to assist in ensuring that each student attains as much as possible.

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Goals in Vocational Education

Goals for student attainment should be relevant. Achieving sequential goals should assist each student to qualify for a position in the world of work. Vocational education objectives should be vital for all students in the school setting. The objectives stress effort being employed by learners to achieve optimally. Each vocational class has its demands and is not a place for students to shirk or refrain from progressing. Too frequently, vocational classes have attached concepts such as mediocrity, easy, and irrelevant.

Definite goals, worthwhile in society, should be emphasized in each vocational education class. Time on task to achieve sequential objectives needs to be in evidence. Tasks are worthwhile, demanding, purposeful, and of value in goal attainment. The goals do no emphasize what students have already attained, nor are they unattainable. Rather, the goals stress that which is achievable. Goals need to stress students attainment of understandings(facts, concepts, and generalizations), skills (problem solving, critical and creative thinking, listening, speaking, reading , as well as writing), and positive attitudes (beliefs, ideals, and values).

Goals are not merely written on paper. They are selected from among alternatives by competent instructors in vocational education. Each goal then is chosen and prized as having merit. Emergent goals may well arise as a course progresses and as students reach toward completion of tasks. Input from students through projects, activities, and tasks planned cooperatively with the instructor can have much merit. What emphasizes student-instructor planning within any course must be appraised in terms of quality standards.

Goals in vocational education should reflect the needs of those students where high school is terminal education in the formal curriculum. Vocational education also

addresses the needs of those pursuing additional education be it in the vocational arena or the liberal arts. Also, unfilled jobs in the world of work provide goals to emphasize in vocational education. A work force that is well trained and educated is needed in society. These workers are flexible and versatile in skills and attitudes possessed. They can adapt to new situations, techniques, and methods in the work arena. Difficulties are resolved through problem solving and not through force, negativism, or unbecoming behavior. Quality communication skills assist in working harmoniously with others. The skills include oral, listening, reading, and writing. These four skills must be integrated into the total vocational education curriculum.

Learning Opportunities in Vocational Education

Learning opportunities for students to achieve objectives need to follow selected principles of learning from the psychology of education. One principle of learning is to secure the interests of students. If the interests of students are minimized, the dropout rate may increase. Holding power of students in vocational education classes is important. To secure employment, especially when high school is terminal education, the student needs to feel interest in ongoing lessons and units. Reentry students also need to experience interest in order to stay with it. A stimulating, competent instructor in the field is needed. The instructor needs to develop as well as maintain student interest in a class. He/she has a variety of carefully planned learning opportunities. These include the concrete (realia, objects, models, and representations of reality), the semi-concrete (films, slides, video tapes, video discs, computers and software, transparencies and the overhead), as well as the abstract (lectures, explanations, reading, writing, discussions, and reports).

Students clubs assist to encourage and maintain interest in the vocational arena. Student acceptance and encouragement are relevant concepts to stress here. The vocational clubs and organizations should relate directly, as well as indirectly, to goals emphasized in course work.

A second principle of learning stresses students perceiving meaning in ongoing tasks. To perceive meaning is to understand what is being taught. Meaning is sequential and cumulative. What is understood may well be remembered much longer than that which is vague and lacks clarity. Long term memory has as a basis that students attach meaning to ongoing activities.

Meaning also needs to be expressed in diverse situations in life itself. Life contains the absurd, the ridiculous, and ambiguous. Society is complex and has strong elements of competition. In some ways, survival of the fittest and a struggle for existence is in evidence. Within these frameworks, vocational education students need to make sense and attach meaning to life. Humanness in dealing with the self and with others become relevant when attempting to attach meaning to life.

A third principle of learning emphasize meeting needs of students. A student cannot achieve well if many unmet needs exist. The late A.H. Maslow, humanist psychologist, has presented an excellent model of needs of people. These needs must be fulfilled if students are to achieve well in the curriculum. The following needs from simple to being increasing more complex must be met, according to Maslow:

1. Physiological. Thus, adequate nutrition, sleep, rest, proper temperature readings, and clothing must be met in evidence.
2. Safety and security. Individuals need to be in an environment emphasizing feelings of being safe and secure.
3. Love and belonging. All desire to be liked by others and have feelings of being accepted.

4. Esteem needs. Each student likes to be prized for what can be done well. Recognition needs must be met for student individually.

5. Self-actualization. Here the student becomes the kind of person desired. What one is and what is desirable from the student's own unique perception needs to be as congruent as possible. A good self concept needs to be possessed by all students in vocational education.

6. The need to know. Knowledge fulfillment can only come about if the previous five needs have been met adequately, according to Maslow.

Instructors and counselors need to work with vocational education students to have as many needs as possible met. Hopefully, with fulfilled needs, each student will achieve as much as possible in vocational education programs of instruction.

A fourth principle of learning stresses providing sequential learnings for students. American Educational psychologist David Ausubel states the the most important item in teaching is to start where each student is presently in achievement. Thus, an instructor would not teach that whish is to complex to understand, nor that which is already known. Rather, by knowing the present level of attainment of the student, the instructor may provide what should come next in sequence for a student. Robert Gagne, Briggs and Wager[1] stress the concept of task analysis. Thus, Gagne, Briggs, a Wager write about the instructor asking himself/herself what it is that students need to learn. The end represents the objective for students to attain. However, to achieve the objective, there are prerequisites which students must acquire. These prerequisites, in sequence, guide students in achieving the objective.

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[1] Robert M. Gagne', Leslie J. Briggs, and Walter W. Wager. Principles of Instructional Design. Third Edition. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1988, Chapter Eight.

A fifth principle of learning stresses reinforcement. Students in vocational education need to experience rewards for positive achievement in understandings, skills, and attitudinal goals. Thus, learners need to receive continuous feedback on how well they are achieving. With quality sequence in instruction, students should experience success in learning. Rewards for doing well might then be rather frequent in the offing. Success in learning provides for intrinsic motivation. Selected students may need extrinsic methods of motivation implemented, such as the giving of primary and secondary reinforcers to spur on greater efforts.[2] Each vocational student must be assisted to attain as much as possible.

A sixth principle of learning emphasizes that vocational education instructors accept each student as having intrinsic worth and value. These students need to experience self-fulfillment, as well as finding their niches in society. Each student needs acceptance regardless of creed, race, religion, or socio-economic levels. Students individually should achieve optimally in the vocational education curriculum.

Evaluation of Student Achievement

A variety of methods need to be utilized by the instructor to appraise student progress. Results from appraisals may be utilized as diagnostic in nature. With diagnosis, the vocational instructor ascertains what a student does not understand and thus needs remedial work in order to show continual progress. Appraising student progress provides feedback to the teacher as to the quality of instruction being offered.

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[2] Gary A. Davis. Educational Psychology. New York: Random House, 1983, pages 133-142.

Self appraisal by the instructor may well emphasize answering questions such as the following

1. Did each student attain the precise or general objectives of the course?
2. Were students interested in learning opportunities provided?
3. Was time on task at an appropriate level for each student?
4. Were students rewarded adequately for doing well during and at the end of the course?
5. Did students feel free to ask questions pertaining to needed knowledge or skills?
6. Was an appropriate sequence involved when teaching students in the class?
7. Were students punctual in attending each class session?
8. Did students achieve basic academic understandings and skills in addition to attaining specific required objectives in vocational education?
9. Did an increased number of students join a vocational club as a result of the completed class?
10. Were students given assistance and vocational counseling as the need arose?

Vocational education needs to emphasize the concept of excellence in the curriculum Excellence in teaching and excellence in student achievement are musts in ongoing course work

Selected References

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Gagne Robert M Leslie J Briggs and Walter W Wager Principles of Instructional Design Third Edition New York Holt Rinehart and Winston 1988. Chapter eight